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Introduction

Framings of Religion, Conflict and Peace

Christianity, Conflict and the Pursuit of Just Peace in Asia

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Abstract

The dominant discourse on the interplay of religion, conflict, and peace is constructed on a Western liberal peace agenda which marginalises many voices for just peace. In analysing the role of Christianity in conflict and peace in Asia, the authors of this issue have adopted a critically self-reflective methodology by listening to the deep yearnings of the afflicted ones in conflict zones in West Asia, South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia. These seven articles critique not only exclusionary politics and religious identities, but also identify alternative theological practices for just peace while contributing to the public debate on the role of religion in both conflict and peace.

Keywords

Christianity – conflict – just peace – religious – secular – violence

Introduction

How we analyse conflict determines both its resolution and the associated peacebuilding process. Conflicts and collective identities are not primordial: they are historically constructed. Nor is peace metaphysical, but political. In Asia, different modern global contexts determine the role of Christianity in

conflict and peace: Western colonial conquests and practices, anti-colonial nationalist struggles, communist revolutions, the Pacific Wars, the Korean War, the Cold War, and post-Cold War politics.¹ These reflect the vicissitudes of modern historical trajectories and the various social, political and ideological shifts among classes, castes, gender relations, interreligious relations, international relations and associated world orders.

Admitting the contextuality of any theology is intellectually honest; but to uphold a theology that seeks just peace from the perspective of those most affected by conflict obliges theology and theologians to adopt a political position and ask themselves: what is my *theopolitics*? The authors in this issue employ a range of disciplines: critical historiography, literary criticism, and critical studies in geopolitics, caste, race, gender and ethno-nationalist identities. Their contributions draw on social movement theories; constructive theological methods in re-reading texts, doctrines, and experiences of the afflicted; anger, trauma and empathy; and interreligious/indigenous encounters in Asian conflict zones. Their methodology contributes not only to Asian just peace theology, it also problematises how correlations between religion, conflict and peace have been shaped, particularly in dominant Western discourses during the last two decades.

With particular reference to religion and violence, I first problematise these dominant discourses before searching for a nuanced approach to the correlations between religion, conflict and peace. Second, I examine some modern political encounters with religion that have triggered conflicts in Asia and Australia, identify the role of Christianity and ask how the authors in this issue engage in the theological task of critique in pursuit of a just peace. In conclusion, I reaffirm the significance of the methodology adopted by our authors for a just peace theology and reflect on the meaning of the cross and resurrection in a Christian pursuit for just peace in the face of war and violence.

Questioning 'Religious Violence' and 'Secular Peace'

Post-Cold War (and post 9/11), a proliferation of literature emerged, mainly in Europe and North America, linking religion, conflict and peace, often presupposing an intrinsic relationship between religion and violence. It is important to note that relations between religion, conflict, and peace were often framed within the rigid binary of secular vs. religious – with 'secular' as a Western

¹ See my 'The Role Christianity in Peace and Conflict in Asia', in *Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, ed, Felix Wilfred (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 283–301.

liberal category and 'religious' as a universal illiberal category. Such framing heavily influences the way conflicts are subsequently analysed and how their resolution is envisaged by a liberal peace agenda. This position has in turn, been challenged. Edward Said, for instance, noted how the simplistic hypothesis of a 'clash of civilisations',² relied on presenting religions and cultures as belonging to intrinsically 'divided armed camps', without any cross fertilisations or mutual exchanges with one another. The West, mainly led by American nationalism – was cordoned off from the rest, particularly Islam.³

In problematising Scott Appleby's sophisticated version of religion's link to conflict and peace,⁴ William Cavanaugh traces the genealogy of an oppositional, categorical distinction between 'religious' and 'secular' as part of a Western imperialist project. This dichotomy camouflages 'secular forms of imperialism and violence',⁵ and promotes 'a secular religion of U.S. nationalism',⁶ thereby constructing 'a dichotomy between the rational and peace-loving West . . . and irrational and violent non-Western cultures, especially Muslims . . .'.⁷ Richard King excavates the 'cultural assumptions and tropes'⁸ in the works of Mark Juergensmeyer that link religion with violence.⁹ Religion is critiqued through the prism of Euro-American liberal values, and 'accommodationist secularism' is upheld in overcoming 'religious violence'. Yet global inequalities, 'many of them a direct historical consequence of the colonial reconfiguration of the globe by those same 'enlightened Europeans' (and now Americans) remain in place despite the rhetoric of the Western liberal tradition'.¹⁰ Thus 'peaceful religion' and 'violent religion' are constructed based on a particular version of secularity in the guise of a universal norm, despite the evident global plurality of secularities and religiosities.

2 Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: The Free Press, 2002).

3 Edward Said, 'Clash of Ignorance', <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/clash-ignorance/> [accessed 20 June, 2021].

4 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

5 William Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 14.

6 Ibid., p. 194.

7 Ibid., p. 183.

8 Richard King, 'The association of 'religion' with violence; reflections on a modern trope', in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*, eds, John R. Hinnells and Richard King (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 228.

9 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (California: University of California Press, 2003).

10 King, 'The association of 'religion' with violence', p. 232.

How, then, should we understand the emergence of different forms of religious fundamentalisms associated with violence? Utilising the notions of *logos* and *mythos*, Karen Armstrong traces the roots of these currents not only in Islam – to which some neo-orientalists limit it – but also in Judaism and Christianity. The modern *logos* ‘which was always reaching out for something fresh’ has radically ruptured the ‘old mythological universe’. Hence fundamentalism is as modern as modernity. It emerged not as a clash with another religion, but within one’s own.¹¹ However, does this explain the rise of political violence associated with religions? Mohammad Mamdani in his perceptive work, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*, refrains from using the term fundamentalism as its origin is associated historically with a specific strand in American Christianity. Instead, he prefers the term ‘political Islam’ in analysing the Islamic variant, challenging not only those who adopt the lens of civilisational incompatibilities but also those critics, who, like Armstrong, overlook modernity’s political dimensions. ‘Both illustrate different sides of the same cultural argument [‘Culture Talk’], which downplays the political encounter that I think is central to understanding political terrorism’.¹² This does not necessarily lead us to question the political interpretation of religious texts emerging from among many different perspectives of our age, but rather sharpens our focus on how one version is transformed ‘from word to the deed, thereby moving from the intellectual fringe to the mainstream of politics...’.¹³ In short, it is not the extremist tendency of *religious or secular* (emphasis mine) that leads to political terrorism, but the political encounter with *modern political power* (emphasis mine).¹⁴ Thus, what is the relationship between religious/secular, political power and violence?

‘States are territorial; culture is not’.¹⁵ Culture is historically constructed; it is not necessarily territorial, but the territorial construction of the state can condition it. States are forged not by right, but by historical conditions. The nature of the political project determines the relationship between culture and territory. To portray the history of a territory in terms of a religion, or to represent the history of a religion as a history of a territory, is to become complicit with an imperial project in which religion as a symbolic cultural system becomes rigidly structured, blurs its fluidity and forms a dominant ideology. The same

11 Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000), pp. 4–5.

12 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), p. 152.

13 Ibid., p. 151.

14 Ibid., p. 72.

15 Ibid., p. 33.

applies to modern secular culture. It is not the religious language of a political movement that makes it violent *per se*, but its political agenda.¹⁶ Language not only communicates reality, it also constructs it; but it does not necessarily lead to direct violence unless it becomes hardwired to political power. Hence, we need to distinguish between structural, cultural and direct violence.

Modern political power was first determined through monopolising violence by the Western nation-states which centrally organised '*formerly dispersed*' (emphasis mine) means of violence into a single fist, capable of delivering an awesome blow to all enemies of the nation, internal and external.¹⁷ In Spain, a Catholic state was built by ousting Jews and Muslims and was expanded to the Americas by massacring and conquering the indigenous people. A British Protestant state was built, subduing the English peasants and the Irish, and then expanded by conquering Asia and Africa. The French Republic was built as an anti-Catholic state, expanding into the Middle East and Africa as a secular imperialist project, and capturing many lands where Muslims were a majority. The USA was built through the bodies of African slaves and on the land of native Americans as the *fulfilment of God's promise* by securing *God-given inalienable rights to land and freedom of religion*. Such dominant political projects were launched in different phases of capital accumulation and imperial expansion accompanied by military might. These nation-states propagated a nationalising, civic religion, dying for the nation sublimity (whether secular or religious), and killing in its name and 'this is truer of our times than it was in the past'.¹⁸ Particularly with the French Revolution, modern political violence is seen 'as necessary to historical progress' and 'as the midwife to history'.¹⁹

Talal Asad shows how many Euro-Americans presented the Christian doctrine of 'the universal dignity of man' to claim that it is a unique value of Western civilisation' absent from all other religious traditions, particularly Islam.²⁰ Santiago Slabodsky reveals how, in conquering the world, the West utilised an 'unequal discursive treatment of violence' in constructing its otherness. Ours is redemptive violence; the other's is regressive.²¹ Those holding the 'true religion' of Western Christianity have a right to convert the other for the

16 Ibid., p. 46.

17 Ibid., p. 10.

18 Ibid., p. 8.

19 Ibid., p. 8.

20 Talal Asad, 'Free Speech, Blasphemy and Secular Criticism', in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*, eds, Talal Asad, et al. (California, University of California Press, 2009), p. 22.

21 Santiago Slabodsky, 'Empty Land: Righteous Theology, Sneaky Coloniality', in *People and Land: Decolonising Theologies*, ed, Jione Havea (London: Lexington Books, 2020), p. 54.

good of the other. It started with the command to 'convert' (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and then metamorphosed successively into the commands to 'civilise' (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), to 'develop' (twentieth century, after WWII), and finally in our days to 'democratise' (during and after the Cold War), all under the threat of death. 'Each time, each commandment is preceded with a rhetoric that presumes that this is the best path not only for the colonised populations but also for humanity as a whole'.²²

Peace was defined by how the conflict was analysed: it is not only 'Just War' (conservative) that has been adopted, but also 'Just Love' (liberal) has been coded in both religious and secular terms: the former *excludes*, eliminates and subjugates those who do not comply; the latter *includes* new converts to the Western secular liberal paradigm, all experiencing different levels of alienation.²³ Peace is possible only under the Western empire; this domain alone upholds the transcendental dignity of the human being. Aloysius Pieris reminds us that the *origins* of the West's language of human rights lie in a series of elitist power plays, beginning in medieval England and leading to the American war of independence. This language has been philosophically and biblically abstracted to reflect an *ideological preference* rather than the 'outcome of a common people's struggle for liberation'.²⁴ The latter forms 'the very foundational experience that gave birth to the Bible, a canon within the canon, by which the Bible itself is criticised internally'.²⁵ The cultural narrative of chosenness and promised land have been territorialised and racialised to assert Western superiority, whilst also becoming enmeshed in a secular, liberal language of rights which claims to be the only ethical measurement of eco-humanity. Through this imperialised symbolic power, the consent of the masses for domination is manufactured.

The political modernity of the European nation-state emerges with a history of 'internal victims of state-building and external victims of imperial expansion' causing social and political contradictions.²⁶ This leads in turn to the creation of a civic space in which arise diverse social and political movements engaged in the hermeneutical task of critiquing the dominantly structured symbolic power of culture. Borrowing an insight from Pierre Bourdieu, Daniel Franklin Pilario notes that 'symbolic systems are not only structured

22 Ibid., p. 55.

23 Ibid., p. 58.

24 Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 114.

25 Ibid., p. 125.

26 Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, p. 10.

but also structuring, if the social agents are not only passive victims but also creative actors'.²⁷ The social agency is not monolithic; it can reflect different positionalities based on the historical conditions of a given social ensemble to shape the hermeneutical task. From the perspective of the oppressed, active social agents can subvert both religious and secular languages, e.g., the secular religious pluralism of the Indian independence movement, Ambedkarite Dalit movement and the rights-based (both religious and secular) American civil rights movement. Consequently, there is a range of possible political positions, each carrying ideological consequences. These various political strands can acquire different degrees and types of power depending on the nature of their political agenda: in this sense, secular and religious do not exist as ahistorical/apolitical, universal, abstract categories.

Both religious and secular are ideologically constructed and intertwined with one another through different political agendas, yet the Western secular liberal paradigm has been treated as though it were the ultimate truth. The inclusion and exclusion of the other – secular or religious – into the dominant system is determined by its inherent expansion logic. Such expansion justifies maximum levels of militarisation, not only within a single state, but in alliances of states, resulting in a geo-strategic complex that keeps the world in a permanent state of warfare, all the while promising universal peace. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how these violent processes unfolded – involving different religions in Asia – and subdued voices for just peace that emerged from multiple social contradictions while exploring the role of Christianity in these conflicts and creating space for subjugated voices.

The Politics of Exclusion/Inclusion and Just Peace

West Asia: Scriptures are not for Occupation, but for Liberation

For Christian Europe, Jews and Muslims have been othered for centuries. Jews have been treated as theological inferiors who lack faith in the fulfilment of God's promise in Jesus Christ. Muslims have been both a theological and political competitor. Depending on the nature of the political project, theological portrayals of Muslims have changed over time from heretics to anti-Christ and the embodiment of evil. Slabodsky shows us how political Zionism – originating in the nineteenth century as a minority strand within the Western nation-states as part of an incipient civil society – was emboldened by the

27 Daniel Franklin Pilario, 'Religions, Symbolic Power and Peace', in *Theology, Conflict and Peacebuilding*, ed. Daniel Franklin Pilario (Quezon City: Adamson University, 2019), p. 21.

Western powers after WWII, and gradually became a hegemonic discourse of the 'normative Jewish response in a post-Holocaust world'.²⁸ Any talk of a 'Judeo-Christian civilisation' as a driving force in Western civilisation has to be understood within this context. Christian theological guilt for anti-Semitism sought absolution in Just Love towards the Jewish people; in turn legitimising Just War against Arabs and Muslims in general, and Palestinians in particular. The militarisation of the modern state of Israel is justified and supported as a modern right, relying on the ideological identification of *God's chosen people* with a strategic asset of Euro-American power in West Asia. Despite Jewish-Christian and Muslim prophetic voices opposed to an ethnocratic definition of Biblical Israel, 'it has become difficult to separate political Zionism from modern Jewish aspirations' due to modern Israel's imperialised encounter.²⁹ Prophetic voices that call for just peace have not only been excluded, but silenced with allegations of anti-Semitism. With a revealing distinction between two types of political Islam that emerged in the anti-colonial nationalist struggle and during the Cold War period, Mamdani links 'the problem of democracy in society with the state' and 'the problem of the state at the expense of democracy in society': with the latter included by the USA during the Cold War as a legitimate harbinger of modern civilisation.³⁰ This move gains concrete form in the USA's geo-strategic move to encircle the USSR by arming the *mujahideen* whose leaders were called 'the moral equivalents of America's founding fathers' by Ronald Reagan.³¹ Now, in the post-Cold War period, they are presented in ahistorical theological terms as *the embodiment of evil*. Even though the binary of Western Judeo-Christian civilisation vs Islam has been constructed, Palestinian Muslims and Christians share a common national identity that resists Israeli occupation.

In the first article, Mitri Raheb, a prominent Palestinian liberation theologian, speaks truth to power by exposing the Abraham Accords that forged Arab-Israeli relations as the USA's geopolitical strategy in consolidating its power in the Middle East while Israel's occupation of Palestinians accelerates to deprive them of their rights as a people. The USA and Israel mirror each other. Their relationship is believed to be ontologically designed, always pursuing the correct path in history, and engaged in an apocalyptic battle with evil in the world – justifying redemptive violence through militarisation as a Gospel imperative – thus ushering in progress, peace and security. Therefore, fake news has not ended with the defeat of Trump. Raheb announces the good

28 Slabodsky, 'Empty Land', p. 59.

29 Ibid., p. 59.

30 Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, p. 47.

31 Ibid., p. 139.

news to the Middle East, and to his people in particular, by subverting and radicalising modern human rights discourse, re-reading it in the light of the incarnation of Jesus and asserting that every life is sacred. Scriptures are not for occupation but to uphold life, particularly those who have been denied the right to live as a people.

South Asia and South-East Asia: Prophetic Anger, Empathy, and Rupture of Memory

In their task of classifying and controlling native populations in colonial territories, the British colonial ruler and the orientalist reduced diverse and fluid religious traditions into one version with the aid of local elites. Advaita Vedanta was presented as 'Hinduism' with the support of Brahmins. Textual Buddhism was presented as the truest form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, believed by the literati monks to have no link to popular Hindu practice. These projections overlapped with the textual portrayal of Indian history as a perennial Hindu-Muslim conflict and of the Sri Lankan history as a Hindu-Buddhist conflict. Anti-colonial nationalist struggles in India were infused with a 'syndicated Hinduism' as Romila Thapar puts it,³² which retained upper-caste beliefs (reformed in some versions, but not transformed) and followed a unitive model, like Christianity and Islam, in resisting the British Raj. Within this framework, there are two main nationalisms; Indian nationalism, which is secular and pluralist – distinct from a Western secular paradigm – and Hindu nationalism which propagates a fundamentalist religious state. Within Islam, there were two movements, one promoting a pluralist Indian nationalism, the other political Islam in Pakistan. The British policy of divide and rule territorialised religion, leading to partition and its massive human cost. Both countries established secular pluralist states, soon to be abandoned by Pakistan and later to be challenged in India by the rise of Hindutva. In the context of America's global war on terror, attacks on Christians have increased in Pakistan, with Christians perceived as responsible for these wars. India under Hindutva – also supporting the global war on terror – has facilitated attacks on Muslims. In the face of caste discrimination, many Dalits have embraced Buddhism, Christianity and Islam in India. In Pakistan, one of the main factors of marginalisation of Christians is caste.

Buddhism's relationship with the political domain in India is radically different from that in Sri Lanka. Buddhism in India became a socially emancipatory movement against the Hindu caste domination; in Sri Lanka, Buddhism

³² Romila Thapar, 'Syndicated Hinduism', <https://indianculturalforum.in/2018/02/21/syndicated-hinduism-romila-thapar/> [accessed 20 June, 2021].

was reconstructed as a *racially territorialised* state-tradition that discriminated against the Tamils. The British Raj carved the island into a unitary political structure as a strategic asset against imperial rivals in the early nineteenth century and contained uprisings in the Indian subcontinent. The island's history was presented as unique in the region, sowing the seeds of Sinhala Buddhist *chosenness* like that of Israel. The symbolic term *dhammadeepra* (island of *dhamma*) was rigidly territorialised with a unitary political structure. In 2007–2009, the West's global war on terror was adopted by the Sri Lankan state to dismantle the *de-facto* Tamil state in the north and east at massive human cost. Subsequently, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists engaged in an anti-Muslim campaign, which was later accentuated by an Islamist political group's Easter Sunday suicide attacks on churches and hotels in 2019.

Islamophobia – a Western construct – is rampant in Asian countries where Muslims are in the minority. Christians and Jews, named as *ahl al-kitāb* (People of Book) in the Quran, were attacked in Muslim countries from the Middle East to Indonesia in post-Cold War politics. As the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia succeeded in building a pluralist state, but was dragged into Cold War politics after a military coup which made anti-communism a key feature of Indonesian national politics. Islamization of the state in the post-Cold War era, the global war on terror, and the rise of Islamic militant groups have severely confounded Muslim-Christian relations in Indonesia. The spread of Christian Zionism – (promoted by the USA and Israel) and Pentecostal churches (aided by American and South Korean fundamentalist Christian churches) in Asia – have furthered not only Christian-Muslim but also Christian-Buddhist and Christian-Hindu tensions. These developments reflect the persistence of coloniality in the territorialisation of religion/religionisation of states promoted through the minority-majority politics of the Western liberal paradigm, and the post-colonial nation-building projects in which other understandings of the religions, secularity and democracy are subjugated. How do our authors from these regions respond to the experiences of marginalisation and violence in creative ways to subvert the dominant narrative of religion, conflict and peace?

Joshua Samuel, a Dalit theologian, ponders the role of anger in a theology seeking justice, peace and reconciliation. The Western liberal construction of religion sees anger negatively: angry religion is not permitted. Tapping the rich spiritual and theological sources of Black and Dalit struggles, Samuel identifies anger as a positive energy that questions one's condition of alienation and its ensuing discomfort, and thereby drives theology to create space for possibilities of justice, difference and true peace. Honouring the presence of anger in these struggles is a mutually enriching exercise that can overcome

the hegemonic ways in which the role of religion in conflict and peace is often configured. Prophetic rage should not be seen as hatred of one's tormentor, but as an infusion of vision and praxis for our theologising to see things differently from an established oppressive order. It can give a sense of worth through self-love to someone whose human dignity is denied, whilst challenging both the complacency of others and the temptation to imitate or compromise with oppression. Engagement with anger is necessary for just peace, not only for the liberation of the oppressed, but also for any reconciliation between oppressor and oppressed.

Drawing on literature, Freya Dasgupta reiterates the need for empathy in responding to complex social relationships amongst Pakistani Christians and their yearning for justice. Without empathy the pursuit of justice is numb. She invites her readers beyond the statistics of marginalisation and persecution by highlighting alternative imaginings of human experience in social conflict, introducing literary expressions of the realities of a marginalised community. Having analysed the effects of British colonialism and the post-colonial political project of the Islamization of Pakistan, Dasgupta reflects on the characters of Mohammed Hanif's novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* as a means to relate with marginalised Christians without essentialising their identity. We are made acutely aware of how the marginalisation of Christians intersects with colonialism, caste, class and gender, as the novelist awakens a concern with justice in the reader.

Septemmy E. Lakawa, an Indonesian feminist theologian, takes us beyond institutional levels of interreligious dialogue to actual experiences of faith communities that experience extreme forms of violence. She highlights women's perspectives which are often marginalised by dominant interreligious discourses on peace. By gathering stories of trauma, the article lays bare the pain, fear and uncertainty of survivors, and carefully reflects on the experience of a female pastor and other survivors of suicide attacks. Lakawa explores the interreligious solidarity formed by Muslim women and others who shared in the agony of a Christian community, thereby rupturing a memory of death with hope for life. The author adopts a hermeneutic of rupture, discerning how interreligious friendship can be formed without erasing wounds by reflecting on real experiences and re-reading scriptures to let new meanings emerge.

East Asia: Grey Market, Ecumenism and Just Peace Tradition

Contrary to a dominant Western view that religion was either absent or dormant during the Cold War, and reappeared unexpectedly on 9/11, a closer look at East Asia, mainly China and Korea, reveals how religion has been a key factor in the Cold War. In *Unfinished History: Christianity and the Cold War in*

East Asia, edited by Philip L. Wickeri, East Asian Christian scholars present insightful accounts of how the Cold War has not ended in the region, but continues where Christianity plays a crucial role. Some Christians who left mainland China established churches in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau. Christians who left North Korea for South Korea during the Korean War contributed to shaping the division of the peninsula. Meanwhile, Christians who remained in China and North Korea resisted the Cold War politics in their own ways.³³ Concerning the USA's hegemonic moves in the region, Wickeri observes how the United States constructed the binary opposition; Communism vs Christianity. 'In this way, the United States, a 'Christian country,' became the self-proclaimed defender and protector of Christianity and religious freedom worldwide'.³⁴

With the support of missionaries from the USA, Korean evangelical churches promoted a virulently anti-communist ideology and were thus part of the Cold War politics that divided the peninsula. Their mega churches continue to reify the same structures of division by treating North Korea as the embodiment of evil. Jin Kwan Kwon notes how these churches developed a binary view of good vs evil; God vs Satan. 'Korean churches regard communism as evil. Churches were suspicious of the in-betweens, such as Christian socialism. Fundamentalism was at the core of the spirituality of churches, especially mega-churches'.³⁵ Christianity was thus identified as being compatible with a particular kind of secularity – that of Western liberalism – and incompatible with socialism. So where lies the Christian pursuit for just peace then?

Co-authors Dong Jin Kim and Youngseop Lim, respectively scholars of Peace Studies and Biblical Studies, employ resource mobilisation theories to explore the formation of social movements, while recognising the saliency of religion in Korean society and provide empirical substance to the interplay of Christianity and social movement for just peace. Building just peace requires active social engagement with the victims of conflict. While mainstream Christianity, driven by an anti-communist ideology, reinforces intra-Korean hostility, Korean ecumenical churches have promoted the Christian just peace tradition based on a biblical understanding of *shalom* in calling for

33 Philip L. Wickeri, 'Introduction', in *Unfinished History: Christianity and the Cold War in East Asia* (Leipzig: ContactZone, 2016), p. 9.

34 Philip L. Wickeri, "'Cold War Religion" and the Protestant Churches in East Asia and the West', in *Unfinished History: Christianity and the Cold War in East Asia* (Leipzig: ContactZone, 2016), p. 65.

35 Jin Kwan Kwon, 'Churches in the Divided Nation – An Analysis of the Korean Christianity Structured by the Cold War System, 1945–1990', in *Unfinished History: Christianity and the Cold War in East Asia* (Leipzig: ContactZone, 2016), p. 226.

reconciliation rather than a securitised peace that defends one domain against another. The structures of division are imperial. The authors reveal a range of unfamiliar, courageous Korean ecumenical moves for peace supported by the global ecumenical movement in resisting the imperial structures that have divided the people of the peninsula.

Contrary to dominant views on China's relationship with the Catholic Church, Cyril Ming Ma, an emerging Chinese theologian, uses the concept of 'grey market' to chart the overlapping identities of members of the registered and unregistered churches. This boundary is becoming increasingly malleable. Renewed efforts at dialogue between Beijing and the Vatican have made many Catholics comfortable relating to the Vatican and the Chinese government. A younger generation is sympathetic towards both churches. The spiritual crisis that has been generated by a fast-changing cultural and social fabric in the country can form a meeting point for churches to develop common pastoral action, and help overcome long-held animosities.

Australia: Reconciliation as Conversion to Indigenous Dreaming

John D'Arcy May draws our attention not only to the conflict between the White society and the Aboriginal people in Australia but also to the ecological crisis caused by the secularist world view which can be overcome with the cosmic spirituality of the indigenous peoples. The colonisation of indigenous lands plundered the earth and suppressed the mythic imagination of Aboriginals. Christian theology initially treated the Aboriginal experience of the sacred land as satanic and played off Aboriginality against civilisation. May states that reconciliation is possible, though not by delivering juridical justice and functional inclusivity, but by conversion to the cosmic spirituality of the suppressed people. Asking forgiveness is not enough if there is no process of conversion to the Creator Spirit who has been active in this land before the missionaries arrived. New theological imaginations founded in Australian creation theologies of the Holy Spirit – which have emerged in conversation with the spirituality of land – assert the creative power of the land to act in this conversion. This veteran theologian's deep insights awaken us to the broad meaning of shalom; social justice for the suppressed peoples and reconciliation are inextricably interwoven with ecological justice.

Conclusion

The Christian pursuit of a just peace in the midst of fraught interreligious relations in Asia is bound to fail without overcoming the rigid binary of religious vs

secular and questioning the dominant ways of constructing religion, conflict and peace within the Western liberal secular paradigm. The main task of a just peace theology in Asia involves critically reflecting on faith as experienced by those who have been tormented by conflict, and by doing so interreligiously. The authors in this issue stand on the rough grounds or fragile places which cannot be fully controlled by any secular/religious powers, believing that no such power is absolute. On that ground, the yearning to end the occupation is spiritual, anger is made holy, empathy becomes sublime, the rupture of memory brings about healing, militarised peace is dismantled, the grey market gives hope, and Aboriginal Dreaming informs the wide-awake.

The violent death of Jesus results from collusion between secular and religious powers, and his cross is located on the rough/fragile ground outside the walls of Jerusalem. In the atheistic cry of Jesus, 'My God, My God, why have you deserted me?' dominant religious and secular ideas come to an end. Mahmoud Darwish, the renowned Palestinian poet, hears in these words an echo of his peoples' abandonment by the world powers.³⁶ As Samuel Ryan writes, 'within this barren godlessness the lineaments of a new divine Face begin to show, the Face of the Crucified God, the oppressed God of the oppressed, whose very agony undermines and shatters the thrones of Powers and Domination'.³⁷ For those who struggle to comprehend violent deaths and abandonment, peace means breaking bread, walking with the unknown, speaking the language of the other and conversion to the hope of life amidst death. That is the new Face of God that should form our theological imagination for just peace.

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36 Mitri Raheb, 'The Journey from Death to Life: The Poetry of Mahmoud Darwish', in *The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine*, eds. Mitri Raheb and Suzanne Watts. Henderson (New York: Orbis Books, 2017), p. 83.

37 Samuel Ryan, 'Outside the Gate, Sharing the Insult', in *Leave the Temple: Indian Path to Human Liberation*, ed. Felix Wilfred (Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1992), p. 142.

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